10: d'Orleans--264 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 302, 832

"The women are not so shy here as in Upper Tonkin. They bathe in the river without troubling themselves about us. One young girl is coloured yellow with saffron, and we are told that this is done from coquetry. Most of them wear a small chignon, in which they often place flowers."

10: d'Orleans--279 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 522, 533, 563, 832 Ethnic subgroups

"They [LSS: Kha boatmen in the service of a Laotian] are in good spirits, and chat from one pirogue to the other, or sing in answer to the women, who are bathing at the water's edge. The men inquire if they are married, and invite them to follow them, in case their hearts are free. The songs, often improvised, are upon subjects referring to love. They also try to frighten the buffaloes that, half hidden in the water, only show their back and the head which they hold horizontally; but the great stupid animals pay no attention to the shouts, they let us pass, contemplating us with an air of fatalistic resignation; but they do not move. In the evening our boatmen ask permission to go to the village. We grant it and follow them, however a few are left behind to keep watch over the pirogues."

10: d'Orleans--279-280 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 517, 584, 832 Ethnic subgroups

"Here we shall have a first glimpse of the customs of Laos; this strange country where love is held in such great respect, that it might be called the kingdom of the flirt. We walk up to the town, and find in the centre a square platform raised upon four posts; from [280] a fireplace formed of stones held in position by woven mats a few logs are throwing a feeble light over the scene. A young girl is seated, a scarf of orange silk knotted upon one shoulder, cleaning cotton by separating it from the seed by hand. Near her stands one of our boatmen, in a small white cloth jacket ornamented with European copper buttons, he is paying compliments to her. Holding one of her hands, he takes out the flowers she has placed in her hair, and passes them through the lobe of his ear. Further on, upon the terrace of a house, another young girl is talking to her lover; a small lamp gives them light, and they are playing at dinner or preparing betel for each other. They will, perhaps, chat together every night, in this way, for several months, simply exchanging ideas before coming to a definite understanding --a marriage generally follows."

10: d'Orleans--308 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 533, 562, 832

"The men gossip with the girls, give them flowers, play to them, recite verses, sing them songs and play at cards with them, but never dance with them. Men and women walk through the streets singing, in groups where the two sexes are apart, or sit opposite the one to the other at the entrance to the pagodas. I shall have an opportunity of recurring to these peculiar love-makings, and I have noticed that, in contradistinction to what generally takes place in the East, here it is the young women who dominate the men, who go through the form of beating them, if necessary, and who condescend to cast an amorous glance at them or to respond to their compliments."

10: d'Orleans--351-352 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 521, 527, 534, 832

[LSS: during the Ngones ceremonies which are part of the Laotian New Year celebration.] "Facing the girls were seated one or two groups of young men playing upon the guitar, the tam-tam and a sort of Laotian organ made of bamboo. Several of them are singing, but when they do so they put a corner of their scarf over their head so as not to be seen, while others take up the chorus. While the singing is in progress, conversation is allowed to go on between the young men and the girls, each of [352] the former taking up his place opposite the girl of his fancy. This goes on until two in the morning, being much like the flirtation of other countries, with this difference that there is no dancing and that conversation with the unmarried girls is more free than with married women."

10: d'Orleans--352 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 527, 539, 832

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]
"In one of the pagodas we visit, I can hear the prayers of the bonzes mingling with the soft whisperings of the love-stricken swain, one of whom delivers himself thus:--
'Oh! my love, you who are my very own heart, I love none but you. It is you only whom I love. You are white and green like the eggs of a crow. I implore of you to be my life.'"

23: Franck--298-299 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 291, 832

"The gay garments, especially of the female branch of the population, make doubly picturesque the market and the long lanes of greenery that represent streets. The women of Luang Prabang capital, unlike their country sisters in the rest of the kingdom, usually wear a thin silk or cotton scarf of bright color over their bare breasts, half covering them, and slipping coquettishly off when they wish to make an impression on one of the opposite sex. The Laosian women of the bush think no more of their uncovered breasts than they do of their bare feet; these sophisticated girls of the silken scarf in the capital recognize them as an asset. There was something about their every gesture that recalled our own flappers--with betel-nut taking the place of gum and of lip-stick. Yet their coquetry may be largely innocent, for the French assured me, in some cases rather regretfully, I [299] thought, that in Laos there are few of the congaie facilities so common in Annam."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Moi AM9
M'nong

and we were down to the nursing-mothers, who, removing their babies from the breast and passing them to onlookers, tripped lightly towards us. Although the rice-alcohol, with its queer burnt-cereal taste, was weaker than usual, my friends said, it was beginning to take effect. The Moïs had slipped into an easy-going joviality and the nursing-mothers received some mild familiarities, for which they exchanged good-natured slaps. Their capacity for alcohol, though, was greater than that of the elder ladies, and they were not to be deceived by a mere pretence of drinking on our part. Calling for beakers they sucked up the alcohol, spat libations, syphoned off liquor until the beakers were filled, and presented them to us. Taking stock of the situation we saw that we had drunk our way to within two nursing-mothers of those perfect young representatives of the Polynesian race, the chief's daughters, who flung us occasional glances from between sweeping lashes. But we were all flagging, dizzy with the alcohol and the stunning reverberation of the gongs. And the morning was wearing on. It would have been difficult to imagine our condition by the time we had drunk our way down to an interesting social level. The Moïs encouraged us with smiles and gestures, but we could do no more.

It was at a village in the vicinity of Buon Dieo, where two years previously an extraordinary affair had taken place. A family of eight persons were suspected of magic practices to the detriment of the village. According to local custom a representative was chosen as accuser and a trial by ordeal arranged. This consisted of the villagers' champion and the head of the accused family plunging their heads under water, the first to withdraw his head, in this case the accused, being held to have lost the day. According to the rulings of customary law governing this rather unusual case the charged persons were found to be possessed by certain minor demons, located in each case in a bodily organ. The general attitude thus was a sympathetic one. The prisoners were regarded

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485 in each center who will represent him, handle business in his absence, collect at leisure the stock of trading merchandise needed for the next [195] trip, and also provide a home for him where he is sure to find a smiling face and a warm welcome in the course of his wanderings.

554
595 Among the nobility and the so-called princely families polygamy is the rule and is almost obligatory for the sake of prestige, which demands a greater or lesser number of concubines depending on the husband's rank. It may sometimes happen, for various reasons, that there are two wives whose progeniture enjoy a higher rank and inherit the titles and duties of the father. It also happens, in this social milieu, that the first wife or wives will see that their husband is growing old, worn out and morose, and will seek to distract him during his last years by making him marry quite young girls for whom he is more of a father than a husband but who give him the illusion of rejuvenation and bring joy and gaiety into the house with the light of their youth (1).

(1) Thanks to the docile character of Laotian women in general, and also to the atavistic imprint of custom which makes them regard polygamy as an entirely natural status, peace and harmony are rarely troubled in such households. A hierarchy naturally arises among the various wives and concubines. Each of them remains in the place assigned to her by the date of her entry into the household and enjoys any special favors which may be conferred on her by their common husband without arousing any jealousy.

Quarrels between wives are so rare that when one does by chance occur the corporal punishments decreed by ancient custom are unhesitatingly applied. The situation is of such a nature as to preserve among Laotian wives a spirit of conciliation and amiability which is not the least of their charms.

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834 Kissing. Punishment for amatory offenses. Like most of the peoples of the Far East, the Laotians do not indulge in kissing, at least not in the European manner. They rub their noses against the skin of their children or wives and sniff more or less noisily.

Although the morals of the Laotians seem excessively free to us and their remarks, songs and gestures often border on what we would describe as obscenity, we should not conclude that the Laotians are deliberately lewd or cynical. They are instinctively careful to be

decently covered at all times, [196] especially in public. There is nothing to shock one's modesty, then, if their clothing is by some chance disordered or even if they take it off completely, as when bathing. It may be said that Laotians of both sexes feel the utmost repugnance to disrobing when they sense that they are observed. 832 834

Although it is true that during festivals and certain public celebrations the men parade "phalli" and make suggestive gestures, and that extremely licentious remarks are exchanged on such occasions, we should remember that all these actions are a vestige of the paganism under which the male organ was glorified as an emblem of generation. The acts are much rather the traces of a rite surviving from a religion of the earliest times than an obscene provocation made before an audience in which there are a large number of children.

The sentiment of pudicity is so very real in Laos, despite appearances to the contrary, that the laws specify comparatively heavy punishments for contact in public between individuals of opposite sexes. These penalties vary with the acts committed, which are classified in three categories: 684

1. Clasping the waist, kissing;
2. Touching the breasts, fondling;
3. Rape.

Prison, corporal punishments and fines are the penalties applied to offenders. They vary in severity depending on the rank of the girl or wife, that is to say depending on whether she is of common, noble or royal blood. Sentence may be pronounced by the court on the basis merely of a statement by the plaintiff, or on the basis of a statement by a third party, whether an eyewitness, relative, friend or simple passerby.

The fines paid by gallants who are too enterprising and not sufficiently discreet are used as offerings accompanied by propitiatory sacrifices either to the protective "Phis" of the victims or to the Spirits or Genii of their region or house. It is customary, finally, to offer a feast to nearby relatives and friends whom one may suppose to have been offended by the reprehensible acts of the guilty parties. [197] [Illustration] [198] [Blank page] [199]

Adultery. Divorce. "Since natural inclinations are rarely opposed in Laos, and since divorce is an extremely simple matter through mere mutual consent, cases of adultery are very rare.

"Divorces, on the other hand, are numerous.